1917

By EDWIN BALMER

Herewith is presented the eighth installment of a fiction serial dealing with what might happen should European powers, after they had settled their own differences, wage war upon the United States. The author, one of the best fiction writers in the country, has based his story upon a thorough understanding of military, naval, and internal conditions in the United States and upon a sound knowledge of military and economic history. The story will cause you to realize the critical situation in which this country and you, your neighbors, and your family are placed by the let-well-enough-alone attitude of the pacifists.

SYNOPSIS

In Elgin, Ill., live the Ashby family, consisting of Nathan Ashby, owner of the Ashby Brass company, and his wife; a daughter, Nellie, married to Bob Wendell, a navy lieutenant, and Jim Ashby, a son, engaged to Agnes Ware. Nathan Ashby is the archetype of pacifist, deaf to the warnings of the imminence of danger to America, and his deafness in this respect is shared by his son. They are impatient with Bob's refusal to resign from service and take a more lucrative job with a business concern. In the Ashby works there are two foreign chemists, Ingouf and Enloe, experts in their line. Their night work and the discovery of an incendiary bomb in the brass works arouse Bob's suspicions. While driving down a lonely road with Jim they discover the two chemists on motorcycles ahead of them. Thinking they are being trailed, the chemists hurl bombs back at the car and a revolver battle ensues. Ingouf is killed by one of his own bombs, but Enloe escapes.

Lieut. Barrett of the U. S. Scout Cruiser Salem has, in defiance of orders to proceed to Haiti with two of the government's representatives aboard, steamed east in the north Atlantic and encountered the fleet of the former European enemies. The foreign fleet fires on the Salem—a deliberate act of war—and a one-sided battle results in the sinking of one of the enemy's largest ships and then of the Salem, but not before the number and class of ships comprising the fleet and the fact that they had fired the first shot have been wirelessed back to Washington.

Bob Wendell is notified to report at Newport News, and after bidding farewell to Nellie he is driven to Chicago by Jim. After Bob is gone Jim takes out the torn scrap of paper found on the body of Ingouf, which revealed the fact that Ingouf and Enloe were spies who had received orders for their duty at the outbreak of war.

With the address "S. D. Marlatt, Insurance building" on the torn envelope in mind, Bob seeks the building. It is a rendezvous of the Prince Regent's spies and Bob, after an encounter, is knocked senseless. When he awakes he finds himself in a residence. Simulating unconsciousness he overcomes his guard and finds in another part of the house a group of men and women spies engaged in sending out insurance solicitations with instructions to the thousands of the enemy's spies written on them in invisible ink. He notifies Sibert over the telephone, and by tracing the call through the phone company's office Sibert is able to send a squad of detectives to Jim's rescue. A girl, who was one of the season's debutantes and who is one of the spies, discovers Jim and nearly prevents his escape. The spies, when the house is surrounded by Sibert's men, attempt to burn up the building and the papers therein. The girl is wounded by crashing glass and one of the spies is killed. The rest are taken prisoners. Sibert's men gather what remnants of the spies' instructions they can from the ruins of the house.

When Jim gets back to Elgin news that war has been declared and that the president has called for the enlistment of 1,000,000 men, is abroad. There is a rush at the recruiting office, but so many militia officers, who were former subjects of the prince regent and who fear their men will not trust them, resign, that the militia is rapidly shorn of its most able officers. A terrible state of unpreparedness exists throughout the United States. Jim, who once had promised Agnes never to enlist, tells her he is going to enlist, and she hysterically tells him never to speak or look at her again.

JIM got her out of the crowd and started to go further with her, but she would not have him. He turned away from her and went through the tumult of the street toward his father's factory. The noise and cheering were as loud as before—louder, if anything; and a band was parading somewhere blaring "The Star Spangled Banner." But now to Jim there was a hollowness in that noise—a hollowness of a nation at war and unready; a nation in which, before the advance of the enemy, one state cried to all the others for help and, at the same moment, denied the right of other states to ask for aid; a nation throughout which were millions of men and women who by blood and by beliefs and instincts must be one with the soldiers of the enemy; a nation raising regiments for its defense in which no man could be certain of the comrade who might be beside him in battle; a nation which, obliged now to do a year's task in a day, could not yet fully understand that the day had come!

The smoke was streaming from the chimney of the Ashby factory, and Jim could see, as he neared the shops, that work was going on; but as he entered the door he heard his father's voice roaring in violent vituperation. Two men in plain clothes, but displaying special deputy's stars, and a man in police uniform were dragging Nathan Ashby from his office.

"Orders!" the policeman told Jim when for an instant Nathan Ashby was quiet. "Orders from Chicago, as I've tried to explain to him, sir. There's hell to pay there, sir! There'll be martial law by night if the riots keep up. They've arrested a lot of men—one of them named Homan, who had a good deal to do with your father yesterday afternoon. Orders are to arrest and hold for examination every one Homan saw, so we're doing it. That's all there is to it, and you nor no one can do anything different about it till we get different orders from Chicago."

Jim went with his father to the police station, where the cells already were full of men and boys taken that morning; the police, booking Nathan Ashby under the charge of conspiracy against the safety of the state, thrust him with two others into a cell. Jim, able to do nothing then, went back to the factory. Smoke was still coming from the chimney, but all work inside was stopped and the workmen were leaving the building.

"What's the matter?" Jim demanded of Drayton, the superintendent.

"Look at these!" Drayton cried, shoving at Jim a sheaf of telegrams. "They've been coming in all morning as fast as the wires could carry them—and some by telephone, too. Cancellations—all cancellations! We'd almost cleared the boards, you know, to start work on the automobile parts for Detroit; that was canceled at 9 o'clock; and everything else we're working on has followed. The country's paralyzed, I tell you. They're shutting down everything everywhere. That's some of the trouble in Chicago, I understand; they're turning off people by the tens of thousands there and everywhere. And stocks! Lord, they never dared open the exchanges; but the banks——" Drayton stopped helplessly. "O, it's hell's loose—hell's loose, and it's only begun to go around!"

Jim went on dizzily into his office. His telephone was ringing and he answered it.

"Private James Ashby?" he repeated, surprised at first. "Yes; that's me. Are you the captain—O, Connor, you're speaking for him? Yes, yes. I understand."

He hung up the receiver and crossed into his father's room, where Drayton was at the desk replying to the calls which were coming in and opening other telegrams.

"Things are happening, Drayton," Jim said. "Connor just called me to say Elgin's rushing two companies by first train to Chicago; I'm in one which is to go. Connor didn't know whether it's the riots in Chicago or whether we're to go on east. But things seem to be happening."

"The sort of things which will open the Ashby Brass works tomorrow morning," Drayton agreed. "Look at this! The National Arms company has wired us an offer to pay for changes in our machinery and to take our entire output for three years making Springfield rifle shells. Nothing but rifle shells for three years! And the National Arms company's a responsible concern and run by business men who know things. God, man, can you be going for three years' war?"

Jim put his hand over the revolver in his pocket; it was Bole's revolver, which he had kept since leaving the house of the spies; he had it now for his new duty, which was to arrest—or to shoot down if circumstances required—any comrade who proved to be a traitor as the company of volunteers moved to

Jim Ashby

play its part in the tremendous events upon the nation.

For portentous things were happening—portents without parallel even in the terrible "twelve days" of July and August, 1914. Then the whole world—knowing little of the methods and means of modern destruction—was paralyzed as to normal industry and palsied to all new enterprise except the awful obsession of war; and now the world knew that war meant for the invaded nation destruction and ruin on a scale undreamed of before. Also in 1914 the world knew that the powers

Agnes Ware

opposed were so equal that neither alliance might work its will upon the other, but now in 1917, upon the neutral exchanges of Europe, American securities—the "standard" securities of a few months before—were obliterated as things of value; and in America everywhere men displayed their terrors of the future. Before noon, when a moratorium was declared in every state in the union, credit had ceased to exist. The men and women who had awakened to a morning of amazement before news office and bulletin board, crushed to the banks to withdraw their money, but they clamored uselessly in the streets and beat upon doors which were closed and barred. And business—except the trade in the supply of the barest daily necessities and the manufacture of arms and munitions of war—was dead. The capitol cried to the country for aid, "A million men between sunrise and sunset"—the million men who, as the country had been told to believe, would ward off all disaster. And in that day the country pledged to the capitol more than three hundred thousand men, a record for voluntary enlistment under any similar conditions; and, with the million soon to be assured, the country called to the capitol now for the protection promised if the volunteers came forward.

So, in the cabinet room at the capitol, the chief of staff—his name was Stone—who was charged with the offering of a plan for the defense of the nation—and Rear Admiral Poe, in command of the navy, faced the president and his cabinet across a table upon which a large map was spread. The map showed North America and the western half of the North Atlantic ocean. Upon the continental section of the chart were chalked the numbers and location of the 300,000 men, including the militia, who already had been raised to reinforce the 30,000 men of the regular army being mobilized in the east. At the mobilization point in each state was chalked the number of men "available": Washington, 3,500; Oregon, 4,000; California, 10,000; Texas, 8,000; Minnesota, 10,000; Michigan, 8,000; Illinois, 18,000; Louisiana, 3,000; Maine, 5,000; Vermont, 2,500; Florida, 4,000; and so on throughout the forty-eight states.

"Those figures mean of course," the general said quietly, "a proportion of from three to five absolutely green and untrained men. In some states the situation is even worse. Nevada has pledged men, but has had not even a national guard organization for ten years. However, approximately one-third of the men now have rifles and uniforms; we can supply rifles to all the rest now enlisted. Entirely neglecting the problems of their equipment, drill, and training, the matter of their organization and transport alone will require many days."

As the chief of staff had been speaking an aid had been laying down upon the sea section of the great chart a number of small seed shaped blocks. As the chief of staff gazed at them the eyes of the president and his advisers followed.

"What are those?" the secretary of the interior inquired.

The aid continued to lay down additional blocks as the general replied. "Those are some of the transports of the enemy. According to the figures which the general staff furnished the house some time ago, the number of the first expeditionary force sent to attack us was calculated to be in excess of 250,000 men. We have no reason to believe the force now at sea is less. They are, of course, thoroughly trained troops, completely organized and disciplined, and have adequate artillery of all sizes and entirely adequate supplies of ammunition."

The aid placed his last block; the chief of staff bent closer and read the longitude figures.

"You have placed the transports where, according to our information, they were yesterday," Stone said; he put his hand over the blocks and swept them toward the American coast. "Today, of course, they must be 300 miles nearer."

The president, as he gazed at the new position of the ships, wet his lips and clinched his hands. The secretary of war estimated again with his glance the distance of the enemy's transports from the coast and the distance of the points inland upon which were marked the numbers of the militia levies.

"You will explain," the president directed, "the plan of the general staff for the present contingency."

"That part of the plan already under the authority of the general staff is being carried out, as you see," Stone referred to the map. "The coast defenses are being manned to their full capacity as rapidly as possible and adequate ammunition is to be supplied as quickly as it can be manufactured. The national guards of the coast states are being mobilized in their own states and will remain to defend their own states until the objective of the enemy is determined. The national guards of other states are being mobilized, as you see, in their own states, and as rapidly as possible will be concentrated at a secret railroad center. The regular army is being reformed so that each battalion at peace strength shall be the nucleus of a regiment at war strength, forming a brigade, with the colonel as brigadier, the batallion commanders as colonels, and corresponding promotion of other officers and noncommissioned officers, and with privates made noncommissioned officers.

"The navy should at once be concentrated in Long Island sound and the national guard of New York, increased to war strength, should be sent to Long island. With this done and with the army concentrated at a point unknown to the enemy, it will not be feasible for him to make a landing south of Portland, Me., or north of Chesapeake bay without exposing himself to the double danger of a naval attack and a land attack at the moment of debarkation."

"With the probable result?"

"That the enemy would have to land in a southern state, where he could do little military damage and where he should be left to roam, watched by cavalry which would destroy all railroads in front of him until our army, equipped from the New England factories and hardened by training, is able to meet him in the open field."

"You mean to sacrifice the south?"

The chief of staff turned patiently to the secretary of the navy. "I mean to choose no section of our country for sacrifice," Stone replied curtly. "I hope to force the enemy to occupy a section where, in addition to having to transport his munitions from over the seas, he will be obliged to bring all food for his soldiers also—a section which cannot be held by us if the northern Atlantic seaboard fall, but which may be redeemed if we hold our industrial centers. To prevent the enemy supplying himself from our storehouses, I ask that measures be taken at once to prevent foodstuffs from moving from the west into the seaboard states."

"And starve our civil population? The whole proposal is infamous!"

The chief of staff flushed a little under his tan and his hand on the table twitched. "What is your alternative proposal?" he questioned the secretary of the navy.

"To defend the whole seaboard!"

"You mean to offer battle with the enemy at sea?"

The secretary of the navy hammered the table. "I mean to fight for the whole nation, if we lose every ship, before I would consent to cowardly locking our dreadnaughts into a sound for the protection of one group of states!"

The chief of staff turned from the secretary of war to the admiral beside him.

"The superiority of the enemy at sea—as reported by the Salem—is conservatively put at twenty-two to fourteen against us, is it not?" he questioned.

Poe nodded. "Conservatively—and if we are able to assemble all our first line ships in time."

"And that superiority is absolutely decisive?" the president inquired.

"A superiority of 10 per cent has usually proved absolutely decisive, sir."

The secretary of the interior rose to his feet. "I recognize that this is no time for sectional differences; but the president has authorized me to advise you of the claims of the part of the country from which I come and which has appealed to me to represent it in his council. The citizens of the Pacific coast states, alarmed by activities on the other shore of the Pacific, have become convinced during the day that as soon as we become involved in the eastern section Japan means to move against California as she moved against Tsingtau when Germany was involved. I have been receiving demands from the governors of all the far western states, mayors of cities, and prominent individuals to urge you to send our entire force of first line ships through the Panama canal at once for the protection of our western coast.

"You have just heard that the preponderance of power in the Atlantic is in the hands of the enemy; at best our navy may succeed in the Atlantic in altering the landing point of the enemy; in the Pacific it will be decisive in protecting us from aggression. Further, unless adequate naval protection is furnished the western coast, the states there will be obliged to act for their own protection. That means, gentlemen, that the western states will not send troops to the aid of the east. The state of Texas already has been obliged to station its troops on the Mexican border to take the place of the regulars now withdrawn."

The Californian sat down. The secretary to the president, who had entered the room the moment before, advanced to the head of the council table and laid a report before the president, and above it a telegram in code with the translation of the code words written in pencil below the message. The president read the telegram, jerked back, and then, controlling himself, looked along the table.

"The question as to whether we are to send our fleet to the Pacific or keep it in the Atlantic has been removed from the field of our discussion, gentlemen. Gen. Goethals has just telegraphed that the Gatun dam was destroyed an hour ago by a series of charges of high explosives. For six months, at least, the Panama canal is closed!"

"Then the fleet must go around the Horn to the Pacific!"

"We must offer battle at once in the Atlantic!"

"We must——"

For a few moments, as he read over the brief report brought him by his secretary, the president permitted the storm of debate to rage about him. Then he silenced it gravely and said:

"Gentlemen, the disposition of the enemy's forces, as just now brought to me, makes it imperative that whatever action we take should be ordered without a moment's further delay; and in this emergency I must agree with the secretary of the navy, and as so, it seems, with the majority of you; I order the fleet to sea to battle with the enemy at the earliest possible moment and under the most favorable conditions for the defense of our country!"

* *

"BATTLE STATIONS."

A gun was going "Thunn! Thunn!" It ceased and opened again, firing more quickly. "Thunn! Thunn!" and now, further away, echoed different detonations, "Lamm! Lamm!"

"That's not saluting!"

"Saluting? I should say not; nor practice either."

"Then, what is it?"

"Anti-aircraft, I should say."

The special from Chicago, now running on the Chesapeake and Ohio tracks, pulled into the station at Newport News, and as the officers led the bluejackets from the cars the firing on the river became more distinct.

Bob Wendell, not having charge of a detail, went from the station with the officers, who were similarly unattached, and hurried down to the water front. The estuary of the James river, where it widens to Hampton roads, lay gleaming under the warm afternoon sun. A wind from the ocean was whipping up white spray in the roads and the launches and little boats in the James rolled and splashed on their errands to and from the grim, gray battleships lying away toward Norfolk.

"Anti-aircraft, all right!"

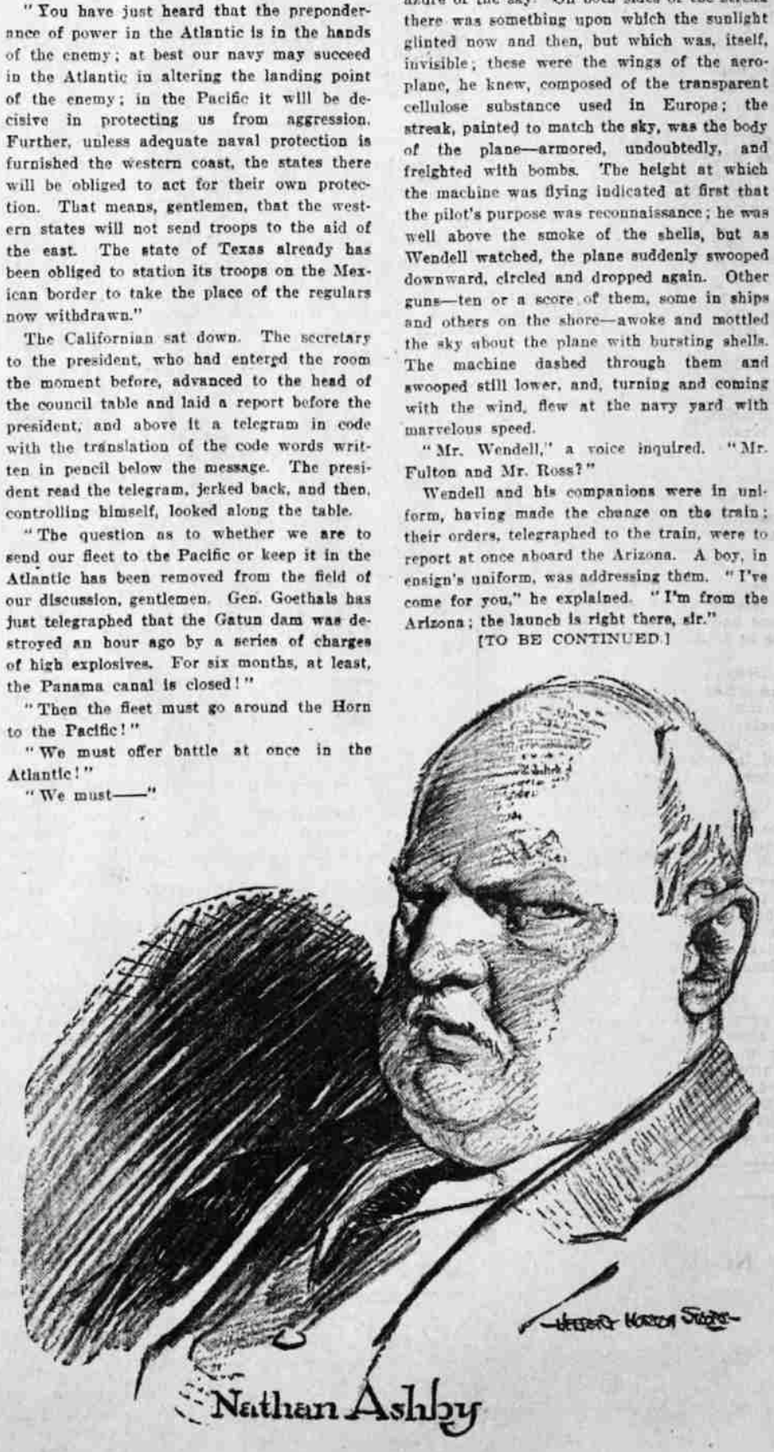
A gun was aimed almost directly upward from the forward deck of a destroyer in the middle of the river. A haze of powder gas puffed from its muzzle, for the gun was firing as rapidly as the gunners could handle the ammunition. "Thunn! Thunn!" the detonation of the discharge thudded across the water, and from high overhead echoed the bursting of the shells. Big blobs of white smoke spotted the sky where the shells were breaking; there were more white blobs up there than one gun could fire; another rifle must have come into action. Wendell, listening, heard the noise of a second gun from down the river, and yet for a moment more he failed to discern the target.

It was only a streak when he saw it—a delicate blue line barely discoverable against the azure of the sky. On both sides of the streak there was something upon which the sunlight glinted now and then, but which was, itself, invisible; these were the wings of the aeroplane, he knew, composed of the transparent cellulose substance used in Europe; the streak, painted to match the sky, was the body of the plane—armored, undoubtedly, and freighted with bombs. The height at which the machine was flying indicated at first that the pilot's purpose was reconnaissance; he was well above the smoke of the shells, but as Wendell watched, the plane suddenly swooped downward, circled and dropped again. Other guns—ten or a score of them, some in ships and others on the shore—awoke and mottled the sky about the plane with bursting shells. The machine dashed through them and swooped still lower, and, turning and coming with the wind, flew at the navy yard with marvelous speed.

"Mr. Wendell," a voice inquired. "Mr. Fulton and Mr. Ross?"

Wendell and his companions were in uniform, having made the change on the train; their orders, telegraphed to the train, were to report at once aboard the Arizona. A boy, in ensign's uniform, was addressing them. "I've come for you," he explained. "I'm from the Arizona; the launch is right there, sir."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



Nathan Ashby